

JANUARY 1, 1923

SUBSCRIPTION:  
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FIFTEEN CENTS A COPY

# MACLEAN'S

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MACLEAN PUBLISHING  
COMPANY, LIMITED  
VOLUME XXXVI  
NUMBER ONE

## THE WAR OF THE CAPTAINS

A NOVELETTE COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE charts called it Heaven Island, and its appearance and climate in no way belied its name. The books on Pacific sailing directions gave it as one of the finest places at which to water, and in the old days many ships made it a point to call there. But that was before "Black" John came. Since then it had been taboo to all "windjammer" skippers who commanded small ships, and none of them made a stop there if it could possibly be avoided. For there were rumors afloat, ugly rumors, whispered in the Pacific saloons, muttered on the poop decks of trading schooners, echoed again even in the fo'c's'les of flash steam-packets that raced the mail from northeast to southwest and back again through all the Islands.

Heaven Island lay exactly on the equator, in an area of sea and a small archipelago over which a third-rate power exercised jurisdiction, and kept order by means of a drunken official five hundred miles away and an old, broken-down wooden cruiser that spent most of her time getting off sand-bars and mud-flats. It was this fact that made "Black" John's position so secure. The only law that could touch him was not in working order.

Rumor had it that the big Frenchman himself was an escaped convict from Noumea, Devil's Island, and that

*A story of swift justice coming out of the sea, to blaze for a moment into blood and fire, and to sink again into peace*

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

ILLUSTRATED BY DUDLEY GLOYNE SUMMERS

he dared not venture off Heaven Island for fear of capture. Certain it is that in time he drew to him the renegades of all the Pacific. Men who had to flee the greater law of the British, Japanese, or French Mandate Islands came eventually to "Black" John and his kingdom, where extradition laws did not run and the welcome they received was friendly in the extreme. The Frenchman rapidly grew rich, only the bank in Sydney knew just how rich. The island was well-wooded and fertile. Copra plantations sprang up. There was some shell in the narrow lagoon on the north shore. Sago grew in parts, and all in all Heaven Island was well worth having.

The men who came for shelter from the wrath of more civilized parts worked the plantations, superintending the black laborers who were forcibly imported from the mainland of the greater island away to the east, and were never allowed to return to their homes. Others of the white men superintended the sago trees, and others sailed the

Nauru, a big three-masted square-rigger in which "Black" John sent his wares to the markets. But the latter were men who were not very badly wanted by the authorities, and they were men well paid and trusted, so that they would not talk of things that happened.

But Heaven Island had an uglier name than that of being a shelter for criminals. Ships passed the island on their way to Samoa from the north, especially sailing ships, and occasionally one would be becalmed. It was whispered that no ship becalmed off Heaven Island ever continued her voyage. But if "Black" John and his powerful launch and his gang of renegades had anything to do with the disappearance of such ships that never came home to port, there was no definite evidence. There was no trace. Never was a timber or a spar of the ships ever afterwards found. And so, when it came right down to bedrock, everything was rumor. How the rumors started was never known. Perhaps the dusky frigate birds whispered them to the natives who pretended they could understand bird language, but more likely the crew of the Nauru dropped hints of night burnings when deep in liquor in the Apia saloon.

Be that as it may, for seven years ships continued to disappear, until the schooner captains took the passage past



One hot night in December, fifteen men gathered in the stuffy saloon of the steam yacht, "Tiger," anchored in Apia harbor, in the island of Samoa.



Heaven Island no more; when it was noticed that more ships came home to port.

Once the authorities in Samoa had been stirred to life, when a prominent group of island planters and traders had demanded that investigations be made. But the authorities could do little without evidence. They could not act on rumors. It was true they sent a British cruiser with sealed orders to Heaven Island. She had dropped anchor there and sent a party ashore with the ostensible idea of securing some fresh water, while the officers of the party had strolled around and chatted with "Black" John, taking in every detail of the island. But they had found nothing that could be definitely called suspicious. They had made some pointed remarks about the massive pointed-stake-stockade that surrounded the white men's houses, obviously for defence, but the Frenchman had politely reminded them that his laborers were cannibals and that he was a nervous man. And inside the stockade there was nothing in view suspicious.

Had the commander of the cruiser in his survey sighted a single timber, a chronometer, a ship's wheel, a log-book, anything that might have come from a looted ship, he would have landed an armed party and annexed the island to his country. But there was not the least excuse given him, not the slightest sign of anything to support the ugly rumors, except the giant stockade and the gathering of ruffians. The cruiser returned to Samoa and nothing more was done. And "Black" John continued to grow richer and ships continued to disappear, though less and less frequently as they took other routes. Not even a fragment of cargo was afterwards identified as it came from the "Nauru's" hold in Apia, but then copra is all much of the same, and so are shark's fins and whale bone.

THE very fact that Dag Malone deliberately hove-to off Heaven Island showed that he was green in the Islands. He went solely by his sailing directions, and they said, without a manner of doubt, that the island was possessed of one of the best fresh water springs in the north-west Pacific.

So Malone checked his little schooner, "The Ghost", one hazy tropic morning off Heaven Island, dropped anchor some two hundred yards from a wonderful, white, broad beach, in ten fathoms and on one of the most beautiful sand floors he had ever seen, and sent ashore a watering party in the whaleboat, consisting of his white mate and five of the kanaka crew. This left a party aboard of five, including Dag himself and his young wife, Teresa.

From the ship, lifting very slowly and falling just as slowly to the deep-running swell, that broke in white foam on the beach, little could be seen of signs of occupation of the island. The broad beach was fringed with tall palms and jack-fruit trees, completely hiding the famous high stockade, and the plantations were farther inland yet, invisible from the sea, except for those planted on the slopes of the one hill that rose in the island's centre. The beach opposite where "The Ghost" lay ran for about a quarter of a mile on each side and then narrowed, while the palms curved out to the very water's edge and gave way to mangroves and sago. The coast continued on from there each way as a sort of swamp, till it joined the lagoon edge the other side of the island and the beach grew broad and white again.

The whaleboat had hardly reached the shore when two white men came from the palm fringe to meet it, and Malone, watching through his glasses, noticed that they carried revolvers strapped round their waists. That gave the stocky, square-built captain food for thought, for there was no mention in his sailing directions that the island harbored any savage natives. Why were the white men armed then? He received another shock two minutes later, when a magnificent white-painted launch shot out of some hidden creek among the mangroves and sago away to the right, and came skimming with powerful "chugs" of the engine across the intervening blue.

In the stern sat "Black John," though the wondering Malone never knew his name, and forward sat two white

men, one with a boat hook, the other with a coiled painter in his hand. Midships another white man tended the engine. Great was Malone's uneasiness to note that all four of these men were armed as had been the two to meet the whaleboat at the beach.

For a moment Malone contemplated going for his own revolver, but then the ridiculousness of the thing burst upon him, and he laughed a little harshly to himself. What else could it mean but a friendly call? There must be some big project going through on the island for so many white men to be hanging about, and for such a magnificent launch to be kept up; perhaps guano or gold

and no accent apparent, leaving the captain still in doubt.

"Mostly trade goods," said Malone with a smile. The other three men smiled too, but not the sort of smile one likes to see. Then Teresa came on deck.

She had been below fixing her hair, and was attired in a loose silk kimono such as she always wore in hot weather. Her hair was hidden under a flimsy cap decorated with ribbons and she looked very pretty as she stepped from the saloon scuttle and murmured greetings at the men. The Frenchman jumped to his feet, offered his chair with a wave of his sun-helmet, and ignoring everyone else engaged the woman in conversation. She shuddered as

she looked smiling into the Frenchman's impassive black eyes, and Malone experienced a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was no coward, but there was something in the air, something intangible that seemed to be threatening, that shook him with fear. He licked his lips and looked at the other three men, noting that they were grinning at each other in a cynical way.

As luck would have it the whaleboat returned just then with the first kegs of water, and Malone excused himself and went midships to see the mate.

"We'll get up sail and beat it," he said tersely. "I don't like the atmosphere round here. How did you get along ashore?"

"I feel about scared stiff, sir," said the mate, lifting his straw hat and wiping his streaming forehead with a sunburnt bare forearm. "I'm telling you those two guys... did you see 'em?... just followed me round wherever I went. And they kept their hands on their guns. It was dirty, the whole show. I asked them what they were doing here and they told me to keep my mouth shut and get back aboard as soon as possible."

"Something darned queer about this all right. I..."

A sharp scream brought Malone up short and he swung round with an oath. His wife was struggling with the Frenchman, who was trying to kiss her, and the other three men were laughing as though their sides would split. Malone ripped out another oath and commenced to run aft, while the mate, jerking a belaying pin out of the rail, swiftly followed him. Then murder broke loose.

ONE hot night in December, fifteen men gathered in the stuffy saloon of the steam yacht, *Tiger*, anchored in Apia Harbor, in the Islands of Samoa. They had not come in a day, nor very easily. It had taken several thousand pounds in money, and nearly six months in time to get those fifteen together, but the fact had been at last accomplished.

Several curious things would have been noted by any onlooker who chanced to know the Islands at all well. In the first place, every man present was a shipmaster, was a man who commanded his own ship, had commanded his own ship, or held, at the least, his extra-master's license. The youngest man present was not under forty, the oldest man was perhaps over sixty. All were alert and able, all were experienced and tried. All were famous in their way, and each one had been the talk of the Pacific some time or another. The saloon of the *Tiger* held the best known captains of all the Islands that night.

The majority of them were spare, lean men of middle height, with faded, sun-washed eyes and bleached fair hair. Four or five were big rawboned men, gray-eyed and massive-muscled. Some few were fat, and some extremely thin. All were dressed in whites, and their sun-helmets lay on the long baize-covered table before them. Nearly all were smoking cigars, and a half-filled glass rested at each man's elbow. The air was heavy with tobacco fumes, dimming the light from the electric bulbs screwed into the deckhead above. There was a low murmur of voices continually present as each man conversed with his neighbour, or joined in a conversation across the table. There seemed however an undercurrent of seriousness present, hard to define.

And this assemblage of famous men, all of them, big of



"Till nightfall to think it over, Sanchi," he had snarled wearily.

or rubies. Still, it was funny that all should be carrying guns.

There was no time for further speculation. The launch swept alongside the dangling pilot ladder midships, though it was hardly necessary with the schooner's low freeboard, and the engine "chugging" died away. Dag Malone, with the true hospitality of the sea, was the first to shake the giant Frenchman's hand as he clambered over the low rail, inquiring after his health and in the same breath shouting to the kanaka steward to serve drinks.

"BLACK" JOHN was a fine-looking man. He stood perhaps six feet five inches in his stockings, and his massive chest and shoulders were as deep as they were broad. He was dressed in immaculate whites, and on his head perched a spotless sun-helmet from the very best clothing firm in Sydney. His face was broad, but not unhandsome, and was half covered by the broad fuzzy black beard that reached half way to his waist, just touching the broad red silk sash he wore and over which his guns were strapped. His fingers were flat and short and his hands hairy; his voice gruff and deep, capable of ringing with deceptive heartiness or sheer cold cruelty. His eyes were black, jet black, without a twinkle or gleam to lighten them and give a clue to the thoughts weaving in and out through the skull in which they were set. Such was the man who shook Dag Malone's hand by the midship taffrail of "The Ghost" and rumbled out a greeting, while his eye took in the visible wealth the ship carried in the form of a deck cargo of Oregon pine.

Following him over the rail came the three other men the launch had carried. All of them were big and bearded, all of them were shifty of eye and nervous in their movements. Also they all appeared to step in mortal dread of the big Frenchman. Malone's uneasiness increased.

But being something of a gentleman the captain made no remarks that might be construed wrongly. Instead he led his guests to the poop and the shady awnings and motioned the steward to serve the drinks.

"What is the cargo you have under hatches?" asked "Black" John smoothly, his voice ringing with heartiness,



little, spare or bulky, was dominated by the smallest man of them all, sun-dried, wrinkled, yellow-skinned Seth Orville, slightly drunk as usual.

He sat at the head of the table, hunched up in his swivel chair, a long cigar drooping carelessly from the corners of his mouth, his black tie gray with ash, and his ragged sandy moustache dewed with sweat. His thin sandy hair drooped carelessly across his forehead and over his right eye, and he breathed heavily as though exhausted. After a while he thumped on the table with a bony fist and glared around on his guests. The hum of voices ceased and a respectful silence ensued.

"TWO of you take a look around," Orville snapped. Two men rose from the long table without a word and stepped quietly out on to the deck. They returned after a few minutes and one of them proceeded to screw down the storm shutters of the ports, in spite of the already oppressive atmosphere of the saloon. The other man nodded to Orville. "All quiet, sir," he said. He then dropped to his chair and waited. The man screwing the ports down carefully closed and locked the saloon doors and then resumed his seat also. Orville's voice dropped to almost a whisper, yet so penetrating was it's dry quality that it reached every listening man.

"Most... most of you know why you're here. Those who don't soon will. I want you all... to swear that whatever is said in here must be a secret for as long as each of you lives. You will understand presently." He looked around and glared and breathed hard on his wisp of moustache. The assembled captains looked at each other and nodded. They understood a little already.

"Gentlemen," Orville rose to his feet, hiccupped slightly, and pounded the table. "Gentlemen, there are in... insects in the best of homes, and the only way to handle 'em is to exterminate 'em. But to start from the beginning... The schooner, *The Ghost*, bound from Yokohama to Apia, was cut off and destroyed off Heaven Island." There was a rising murmur of surprise, checked as Orville went on speaking. "*The Ghost* was chartered by my own agents in Singapore to run a cargo here for me. Dag Malone... Some of you knew him... was a stranger to these seas. He carried his wife with him as well as a helluva trust in human nature. Most of you know the sailing course from the west makes Heaven Island, most of you know why "windjammer" men never take the course now. But Captain Malone did not know. He stopped at Heaven Island for water and 'Black' John came. *The Ghost* was fired and all hands killed except Mrs. Malone and the mate. Gentlemen, Mrs. Malone was my sister's child. You can guess what happened to her." The little man's face was streaming with sweat and twisted with fierce anger. He positively danced.

"LONG" CHARLEY spoke slowly. He was an enormously thin individual, knows as the luckiest man in the Islands and the greatest toper in the Pacific. He had recently acquired a new guano island in the north and for a while was passing wealthy. His large Adam's apple ran up and down his throat as he spoke.

"How do you know this? From what I heard, John don't leave many tracks on his trail."

Orville snorted, glared at "Long" Charley, and then swept the intent faces of the captains. His yellow-skinned forefinger shot out and rested unswervingly on Boggs, Captain Sam Boggs, one of Orville's own schooner men, enormously fat and short and brave-hearted, badly scarred from a fairly recent fight with the cannibals of Ysabel, where he had gone "recruiting" labor for the plantations of the Island millionaire.

"Captain Boggs, who

commands my vessel, the *Lizzie R*, was homeward bound from the Solomons. He picked up a half-dead, insane man. Gentlemen, that man was the mate of *The Ghost*! He had escaped in the whaleboat by some means, how will never be explained. For once 'Black' John left a trace. Captain Boggs gathered the story of the cutting-off while the mate was calling out in delirium. The man was badly wounded and he died two days after being rescued. *That's* how I know!"

"Long" Charley nodded and folded his arms across his narrow chest. "Good enough," he said dryly. The rest of the grave-eyed captains nodded. They knew Boggs as they knew Orville. Their words were better than signed statements.

"THIS thing... hic... this thing's gone on long enough. Hawke, you had a brother on the *Way-lay* that was lost, and how no one ever knew. But she was bound past Heaven Island. We are entitled to surmise that 'Black' John met her."

Wallace Hawke of the brig *Flying Fish*, newly returned from a secret venture into the China Seas, nodded shortly and the man next him heard him swear under his breath. "It has gone far enough," he said aloud and quietly.

Orville's finger shot out again. "You, Matthews. Men called you Tom Hawke's best friend. What do you say?"

"It's gone far enough," muttered the lean little man addressed. He gazed at the table moodily before him and his thoughts were black to judge from the frown on his face.

Again and again Orville's finger shot out, until every captain present had muttered the same words, or signified his assent with a nod. The thing had gone on long enough. There was not a man present who had not at some time or another lost someone near and dear to him, brother, partner, or friend, through the suspected agency of "Black" John. And under the lash of Orville's snapped out words, interspersed though they were by hiccupped, the captains grew angrier and angrier. They had never before been gathered together at once to discuss the matter in its entirety, and never before had they realised the enormity of 'Black' John's suspected operations.

THEIRS was not the hot anger of youth or sudden passion, but the cold determined anger, and far more deadly anger, of tried and experienced men in whom the pangs of grief and sorrow had abated, men with memories, men able to think clearly and weigh matters in their generalities. Their own losses no amount of vengeance would restore to them, but they were representative of all the Pacific shipping, and they could perhaps do something to prevent their fellows from suffering what they had suffered. And this assemblage was dominated by the unbelievably fierce little man who sat at the head of the table, or jumped excitedly to his feet, who spoke through hiccupped and drunken stammers and was physically not capable of killing a dog. But no man smiled at him, and no man felt any contempt for his drunken condition. Orville had a reputation behind him that caused men to forgive his eccentricities, and to remember that the doctors had said that it was only whiskey which kept the life-flame flickering in the shrivelled little body.

Having reached some sort of a decision, Orville came

down to brass tacks with the captains. "The question is, how are we going to eradicate the trouble?"

"It's going to be difficult," Wallace Hawke said curtly. "'Black' John has the law on his side if we attack him. And supposing we did succeed in wiping him out, if it ever became known we should be tried and convicted for murder."

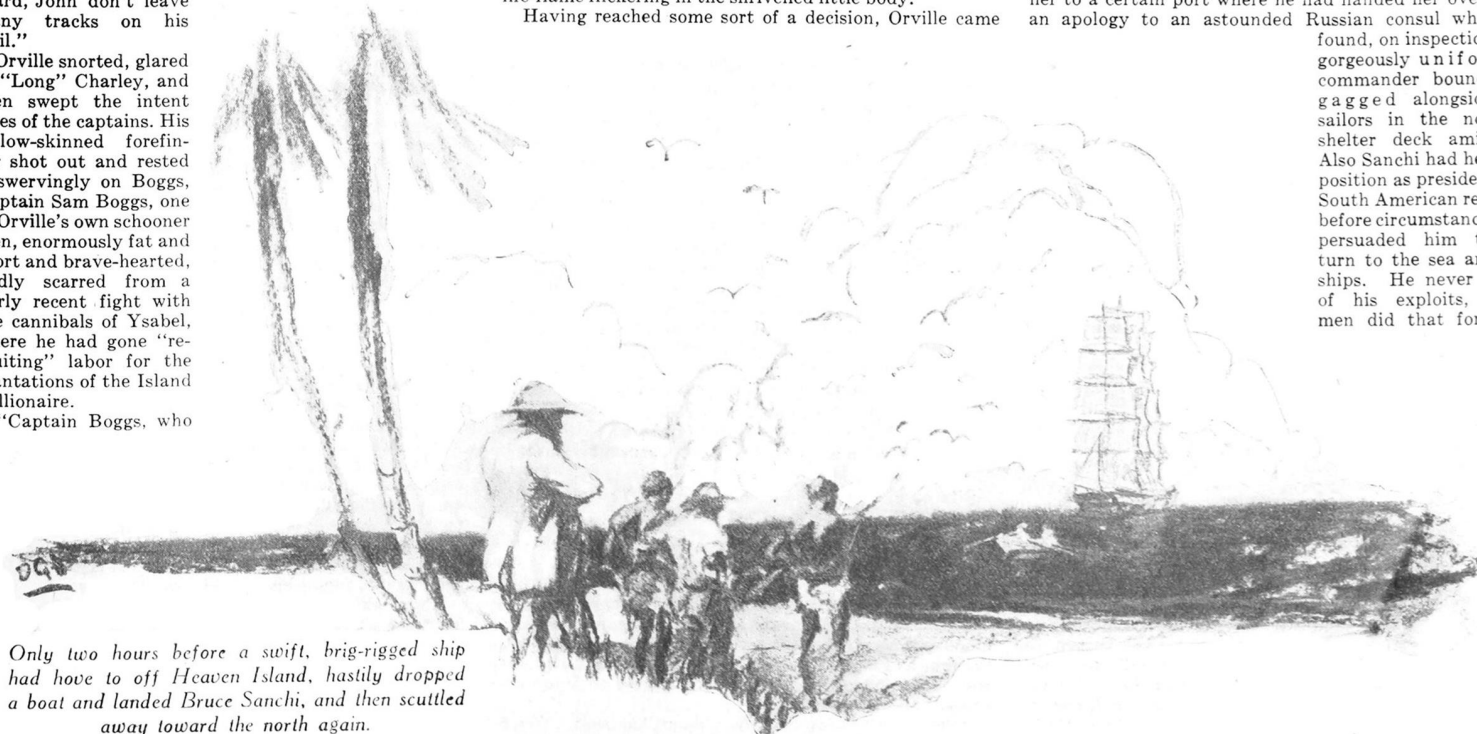
Orville snorted. "That's why I warned you all not to speak of what is said here to-night once you get ashore. We must leave no trace, not a single trace, and there must never be anything said outside of ourselves on what we agree to do. Understand? The Administration is unofficially with us. They won't make any more inquiries than can be helped. And if we wipe Heaven Island from the sea as a blacklisted spot, making it once again a safe watering place for seamen, I believe we shall earn the gratitude of every shipmaster from here to Sydney and back. The native laborers of 'Black' John we can ship back to their homes. They won't talk. And if they do who'd believe them in a court prejudiced in our favor? But, of course, we must make a clean sweep. Not only 'Black' John himself, but every man of his must be destroyed. Without trace was 'Black' John's method. It must be ours."

ORVILLE chewed savagely at his ragged cigar. A fragment of the dark leaf flapped loose and rested on his bony chin. He brushed it impatiently aside and waited for some one to speak.

The captains were surprised. They had expected perhaps a proposal to demand from the foreign power that 'Black' John be removed from the Archipelago, perhaps a demand to the Administration that some steps be taken to allow a cruiser to patrol the waters of Heaven Island very frequently. It was obvious, of course, that the authorities would not convict a man on evidence based on the delirious mutterings of the mate of *The Ghost*, and it was also evident that not a trace of the schooner would be found if a search party visited Heaven Island. But a party of extermination! That was unique, something reminiscent of days in the old west perhaps, reminiscent even of old days in the Islands when cannibal villages had been wiped out to teach other cannibal villages a lesson. But now the Law had come. European governments jealously watched each other in the South Seas. A man could not even shoot a native now, unless first attacked, without being imprisoned for it. For a while there was silence. The captains refrained from looking at each other. On first thought the thing seemed like murder, on second thought like justice. The blood of the younger men began to take fire with the adventure of the thing. Also memories of old shipmates and lost relations began to flicker clear. Bruce Sanchi was the first to speak.

SANCHI was a slight, rather handsome man, wearing a crimson tie in the collar of his white linen shirt. No one would have particularly noticed him in a garden party in England or America. His eyes were a mild blue color, and his hands were white and well-kept. He never seemed out of place in any environment. Rather of a colorless, insignificant type. Yet once, when the Russians had caught him sealing in the Pribilofs, he had captured the armoured cruiser sent to capture him, and had sailed her to a certain port where he had handed her over with an apology to an astounded Russian consul who had

found, on inspection, her gorgeously uniformed commander bound and gagged alongside his sailors in the noisome shelter deck amidship. Also Sanchi had held the position as president of a South American republic before circumstances had persuaded him to return to the sea and the ships. He never spoke of his exploits, other men did that for him.



Only two hours before a swift, brig-rigged ship had hove to off Heaven Island, hastily dropped a boat and landed Bruce Sanchi, and then scuttled away toward the north again.

Once he was asked where he was born. He had smiled gently, as was his wont. "Aukland, sir. . . . Education? Ah, Trinity College, you know."

"Blood and iron, Orville. Good idea, what?" he said now. "Count me in." That broke the tension. Someone laughed softly. Wallace Hawke grunted and his bristling white moustache swelled. "Me, too, Orville. What's the plan?"

"Seems you're all kinda hasty," "Long" Charley drawled. "John's got a hell of a big stockade up on his island. If we land there with a promise of trouble, all he's gotta do is to shut himself up and tell us to get to the devil. Liable to get killed too, if we try t' rush that stockade. An' if we fail in an attack there's sure to be a row. These third-rate powers are always on the lookout for a chance to kick up a fuss. Gives them a sort of international publicity."

There were a few grunts of approval. Orville jumped to his feet, thumped on the table for silence, noticed his glass still half-full, drained it, and wiped his lips before speaking.

"I understand then gent . . . gentlemen, that you are all agreed about the 'no trace' stuff?" Every head nodded.

"It's obvious then," resumed Orville, "that we must figure on some plan to overcome the stockade question. We dare not risk a failure, for there would be no second chance. The Wawa," she was the wooden cruiser of the power that ruled the little Archipelago, "would take us over as soon as she heard. Probably hold us for ransom or some such rot."

Bruce Sanchi grunted. "That's reasonable." "Long" Charley caressed his large Adam's apple with a thin, bony hand and nodded agreement.

Orville took the ragged cigar from his mouth, jammed it back again, and then sat down with some force. One would have supposed from his manner that every man in the saloon was opposing instead of agreeing with him. "I've got a plan," he said at last. "But I'd like to hear any suggestions." For nearly three hours discussion ran high and men's voices were low and tense.

THE meeting of the captains was a fairly well-kept secret. Rumors flew, of course. No one ever speaks of a new pearl-bed he may have discovered, but everyone seems to know just the same. So it was with the meeting, but not even the very high officials of the Administration who unofficially approved Orville's actions, knew just who was present in the saloon of the white-painted yacht.

At dawn the *Tiger* put to sea, and never before had she, or any other ship for that matter, sailed with such a crew. From Lon Matthews, who polished brass among the oil-burning engines below, to Wallace Hawke who paced the narrow bridge as captain, there was not a man who was not a certified master-mariner. There was not a common seaman or fireman aboard. Every possible means to insure that there would be no talking was being taken. The precautions had to be taken, not only to insure the captains themselves immunity, but also to preserve the Administration itself from embarrassment. The yacht was to cruise outside Apia harbor, well out of sight of land, until certain things were said over the powerful wireless she carried. Orville and Bruce Sanchi stayed ashore to carry out the plans approved by the meeting of the previous night.

Matters commenced to develop when Orville approached Ronald Hyde, supercargo of the blackbird, *Lizzie R.*, then laying alongside in Apia, with a strange request. Hyde could hardly refuse, for Orville had been the means of making him a man, through the medium of Captain Sam Boggs, who was master of the *Lizzie R.* And besides, Orville was the best friend of William Hyde,

the millionaire oil man of the States, who called Ronald Hyde son. Then, too, Orville had the wonderful art of making his employees enthusiastic over himself, such an art as Napoleon and Garibaldi had. He was reputed to have the finest men in the Pacific in his employ, and they loved him as they might have loved their fathers. But the favor Orville asked the young supercargo tried his affection to the uttermost.

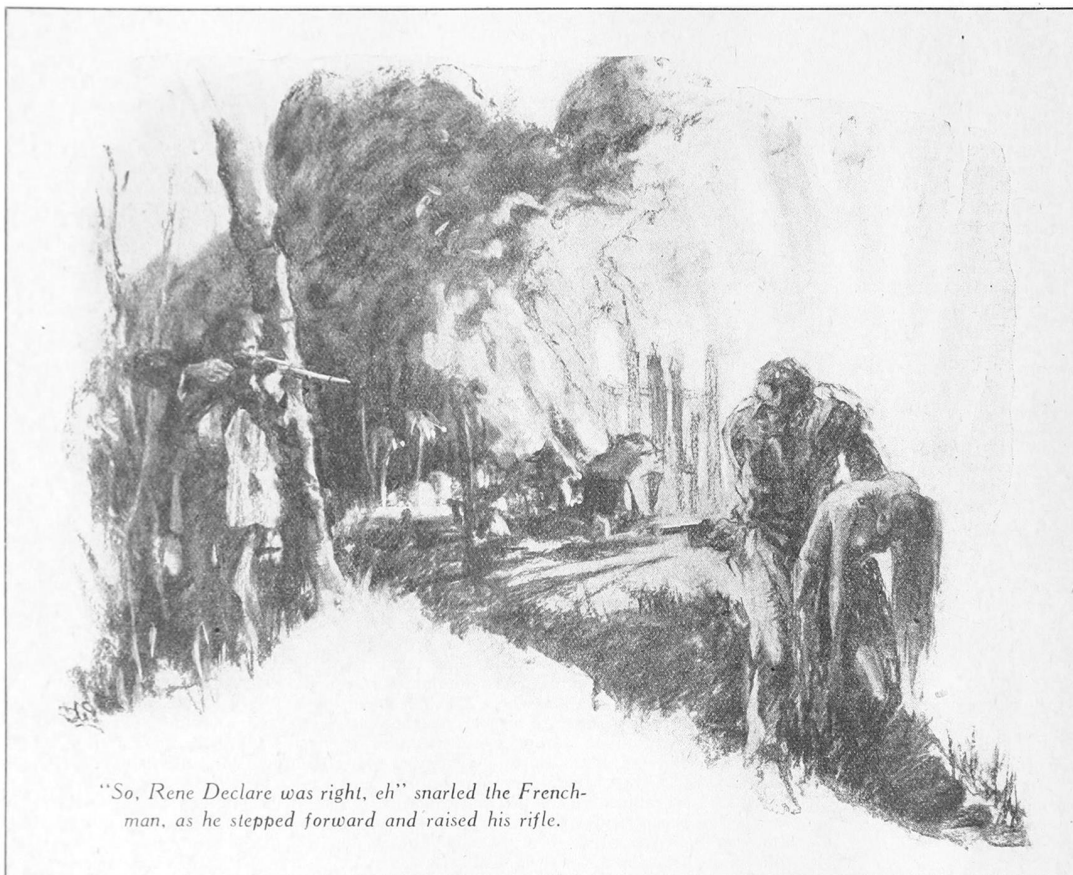
"Hyde, I want you shot!" he said. Hyde, who had long since given up wondering about his employer's motives and aims, only nodded and waited for an explanation. But there was none forthcoming. He looked at the two men facing him on the poop deck of the *Lizzie R.* Besides Orville there was Bruce Sanchi. Captain Boggs was away on the trim, white-painted *Tiger* somewhere to seaward, and at that precise moment was carrying dishes from the galley, where "Long" Charley cooked, to the saloon, perspiring in every pore. The

working out a plan to catch some dirty rogues, and you're being used as the bait. Just act up and keep your own counsel. Things will come out all right."

Hyde turned slowly and then grinned. He could not help liking Sanchi. He looked so mildly inoffensive. And he betrayed in flashes the iron that Hyde had come to look for in men who had done things. They shook hands. Orville rose to his feet and lit a cigar. "Let's drink," he suggested, and set off toward the warped gangplank amidships followed by Sanchi. Hyde watched them go with his frown of bewilderment settling again. Here he was pledged to let another man shoot him. What for? Sanchi's explanation had been very sketchy. Well, it was another of those mysterious intrigues that wove and interwove through and beneath the seemingly placid Island life. He shrugged.

"Stroll down town about dusk," shouted Orville from the wharf. Hyde nodded curtly and turned away. The

kanaka, who had been dozing comfortably, hidden by a pile of hatch canvases beneath the break of the poop, until the sound of voices awoke him, scrambled to his feet and shuffled forward. He had some curious information that would cause untold comment among the water front population. It was only by the greatest ill-fortune, from Orville's point of view, that three weeks later Rene Declare, master of the big three-masted boat *Nauru*, "Black" John's own ship should happen to overhear the kanaka telling, some companions about the curious conversation he had heard on the poop deck of the *Lizzie R.* It did not take Rene Declare very long to connect up the fragment with many mysterious rumors he had heard, and he put to sea immediately, with only half his cargo discharged and for no visible reason. But before all this, other things happened.



"So, Rene Declare was right, eh" snarled the Frenchman, as he stepped forward and raised his rifle.

*Lizzie R.* was temporarily without a mate, so that on Hyde fell the responsibility of looking after the schooner until such time as he was relieved.

ORVILLE introduced Sanchi and Hyde to each other with a wave of his hand and a few muttered words, and then dropped puffing into one of the cane chairs that seldom left the poop deck of the schooner, unless it was in time of storm.

"I want you shot, Hyde," he repeated in a rather low voice, glancing round carefully for signs of eavesdroppers. "Captain Sanchi will pick a quarrel with you at some time when you are in a crowded place. You will strike at him and he will shoot you through the arm. Just a flesh wound. You will act as though you are fatally hurt . . . and leave the rest to me."

"But . . ." objected the astounded young man. Sanchi smiled gently. "But me no buts. Seems bally unreasonable, eh? But trust me. You'll fall in a worthy cause. Don't be afraid I shall miss my aim. Dead shot, what?"

"That's true enough," Orville supplemented. Hyde hesitated and moved uncomfortably. "Yes, that part's all right. But what's it all for?"

"That we cannot tell you. . . . You may hear later. It's a question of your trusting me. Yes or no, now. I can get another man," finished the little millionaire testily.

"I suppose it's yes," admitted Hyde darkly, ramming his hands in his pockets and striding to the rail. He gazed moodily down at the dark water, his brows wrinkled with thought and bewilderment. Sanchi grinned and straightened his wonderful tie. He walked across to Hyde and squeezed his arm gently.

"The gov'nor know what he's about," he said. "We're

and repeatedly. Several well-known officials seemed to be fostering the indignation in a sort of surreptitious manner. Orville certainly controlled a great deal of power. He had wanted a huge fuss raised, a fuss, the echoes of which should reach to the very last corner of the Pacific. He apparently had succeeded.

Bruce Sanchi, the good-humored, the well-beloved schooner captain and adventurer, the Sanchi of Pribiloff and South American fame, was wanted for attempted murder. He had insulted and shot young Hyde, son of the Hyde, outside of Robert's saloon. A dozen men had seen the thing. Orville himself had sworn to it. The attack had been quite unwarranted, brutal in fact. A few words in the beginning, and then blows. That Sanchi should do such a thing was unbelievable. He was normally such a quite, good-tempered man, even somewhat indolent. But the thing had undoubtedly occurred. Orville had offered a reward of one hundred pounds for the apprehension of Sanchi. According to rumors the affair might turn out to be one of murder, for the wounded man was said to be in a serious condition. He was at Orville's own house, and a special physician was in attendance. No one was allowed to see him, which was perhaps as well, for he would have been found sitting up in a comfortable cane chair smoking endless cigarettes, and not at all bothered by a slight flesh wound in his right arm. But according to rumor his very life was despaired of.

Those who had known and liked Sanchi, while wondering what on earth had possessed him to pull such a raw trick in a public place, were rather glad he had managed to get away. The authorities were searching, but the search was practically hopeless. The man had many influential friends about Apia and his escape was practic-

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# The War of the Captains

Continued from page 12

ally assured. Notice was sent to all assistant-commissioners in outlying places to watch for the well-known schooner captain, and the shipmasters who called at Samoa as the days crept by, carried with them, when they left, the whole story, much garnished by details, and spread it all over the Pacific. And all the while Orville rubbed his hands and chuckled with glee and drank many cocktails.

FOUR days after the shooting had occurred, the *Tiger* steamed close inshore in response to a wireless message, and Orville went out to her in his private harbor launch. Then the yacht steamed west and north and for a while was seen no more by the shipping of the Islands. "Heard about it?" grinned "Black" John. "I should say we have. Hell of a stink for a little man to kick up."

Bruce Sanchi, travel-stained and weary looking, faced the giant Frenchman across the plain deal table and grinned. He fingered his half-filled glass abstractedly with a steady hand and wondered if "Black" John suspected anything.

The two men sat alone in a somewhat bare room, opening out on to a broad stone verandah that faced a cluster of palm-huts and low sheds wherein dwelt the white colony of Heaven Island. Beyond could be seen the high pointed-stake-stockade and beyond that the sheltering rows and clusters of palms and breadfruit trees. The majority of the white men were out on the plantations, though one or two, unshaven, short-browed fellows, still lingered about the compound of trodden earth between "Black" John's house and the others, well-armed, apparently as a sort of reserve guard in case anything should happen.

Only two hours before a swift, brig-rigged ship had hove to off Heaven Island, coming from the south, hastily dropped a boat and landed Bruce Sanchi, and then scuttled away toward the north again. "Black" John had received the newcomer with open arms. The news of the Apia crime had traveled before him, and the Frenchman regarded the schooner captain as being of the same kidney as himself. Besides, it would greatly enhance his reputation to have such a well-known man join his colors. The majority of the island's white men were common seamen and beachcombers, drunken criminals with little brain for delicate work. There were few who could be trusted to carry out any sort of important work. But Sanchi could, and he would. He would have to. It was obvious that if he ventured outside the Archipelago he would be captured and sent to Suva for trial. He had come to about the only place in the Pacific where he was absolutely safe. And the price of his safety was that he should serve "Black" John body and soul and heart.

IN THE bare room off the verandah of the stone house, Sanchi told in detail the story of his escape from Apia with the whole force of the authorities netting around him. Days of hiding in the bush, midnight conferences with friends and well-wishers, finally the boarding of a north-bound brig early one dawn and paying in good gold for a swift passage to Heaven Island. And the story was convincing, nor did the keen, jet black eyes of the Frenchman, fixed unwinking on Sanchi's mild blue ones, shake the story. But perhaps that was because Sanchi had actually done what he said he had done. The escape had been an actual fact. And "Black" John knew that the man before him spoke the truth, because he had heard many tales the past few weeks in many roundabout ways; from traders talking, from schooner captains who happened to have called for water at Heaven Island, and whose ships were too big to be attacked with any hope of success. Wherefore he had no reason to doubt the story of the man who had come to him for shelter from the groping fingers of the Law.

It had been nearly six weeks since the shooting had taken place. Somewhere out of sight beyond the sea rim the *Tiger* was waiting for the signal. And Sanchi only waited the arrival of the *Nauru* to give the signal. For all the rats had to be killed in the same trap. In the meantime he devoted himself to wriggling into the

good graces of the island's master. By the time they had had a couple of rip-roaring drunks together, they were firm friends. To the sullen anger of the other white men, Sanchi was made a sort of lieutenant and companion to "Black" John, and shared in all his pleasures.

The position gave him opportunity to look about without rousing suspicions. About the houses he found not the least thing suggestive, nothing that could be definitely said to point to any looted ship, or the killing of any missing man. Behind a taro patch outside the stockade, and on the landward side of the village, Sanchi came across a fragment of colored silk, torn and caught on the rough knot of a koa tree. And by the tree was a long patch of earth that looked as though it had been somewhat recently disturbed, for the coarse grass growing over it was rather tender and new. The silk suggested a woman's garment, the long patch a grave, perhaps of some native woman, perhaps of Mrs. Malone, Orville's niece. But most probably, thought Sanchi, some paramour of "Black" John's.

THERE were women in nearly all the houses, sad-faced things, unlike the usual merry women of the Islands. One of two of the younger, the favorites of the white men, had a fairly good time, but all were more or less abused, and possessed of that fatal home-sickness that affects so strongly all the natives of the Pacific, whether of Polynesia or Melanesia. Sanchi soon found that there were no white women on the island.

Only one thing of all things did Sanchi find really suspicious. Two of the white men, they were both of Portuguese extraction he afterward learned, had a daily duty of strolling along the beach and burning driftwood. Some of it that came ashore with the tide looked suspiciously like ship's timbers, and some of it was distinctly charred. But whatever it was it was not long allowed to lay before the eyes of men. Sanchi remembered that a burnt ship, sunk, will gradually break up beneath the sea and pieces of it float to the surface and come ashore. And "Black" John could not afford to leave a trace.

ON THE third day of his sojourn on the island, Sanchi met Kasiva; and in after years he was apt to thank his stars he did. He had come up from the lagoon, where he had been bathing, and had just entered the great stockade gate on his way to the house that he shared with a man by the name of Simons, an Austrian wanted by three governments for the "wanton slaughter of natives," when "Black" John appeared on the verandah of his house, his beard bristling and a continuous stream of oaths rippling from his lips. He was dragging a woman by the hair with his right hand, hardly a woman, a girl perhaps of some seventeen years, delicate-featured and sweet-faced. She was trembling with terror and her naked body was angry red with weals and grazed flesh. The Frenchman flung her down the one verandah step and stepping after her kicked her savagely. She moaned and raised a hand toward him, while her big dark eyes streamed with tears.

"Don't want to stay with me, eh?" "Black" John grated, his mighty voice rumbling and thick with passion. "Then go out and die. If I catch anyone feeding or sheltering you, I'll kill them. Then, when you're sick of it, come back here and I'll kick you out again." After one more savage kick he turned to go, tugging angrily at his beard with one shaking hand.

Bruce Sanchi smiled very gently. He had smiled that way when he had looked into the eyes of the commander of the Russian cruiser in the long ago, and when he had received the news from his generals that his republic had fallen in the old South American days. He swung the light drill coat he had been carrying over his shoulder under his left arm pit, and thrust his right hand into the pocket of his white drill pants. His gait was easy and unhurried.

"What's the matter, little one," he asked gently, stepping to the side of the sobbing half-crippled girl. "Black" John swung round viciously at the sound of his



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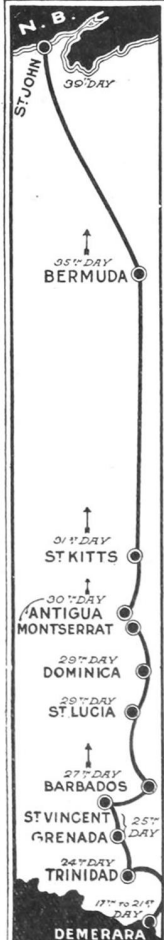
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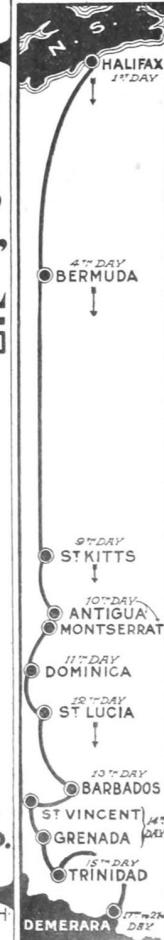
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**ANTIGUA**  
29<sup>th</sup> DAY  
**MONTERRAT**  
28<sup>th</sup> DAY  
**DOMINICA**  
27<sup>th</sup> DAY  
**ST. LUCIA**  
26<sup>th</sup> DAY  
**BARBADOS**  
25<sup>th</sup> DAY  
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follower's voice. "Keep out of this, Sanchi," he said harshly.

WITHOUT troubling to reply, the other assisted the girl to her feet. The Frenchman with an oath made one step forward as though to spring from the verandah on to the back of the indifferent man. "Asking for trouble?" he demanded, his flat fingers opening and closing in the palm of his hands. "What I say here goes! Any man who feeds that—I'll finish myself."

"I don't think you're talking to me," Sanchi said softly, turning round very slowly. The Frenchman went crimson and held the other man's eyes for a long time. They strove to outgaze each other, and finally "Black" John turned away. "Remember what I said," he muttered savagely, and then strode into the house. The sound of a chair being flung across the room came to the ears of the listening man outside. He laughed a little and then grew grave. He had not come to Heaven Island to quarrel with "Black" John, to antagonise him. He bit his lip with vexation and with a curt few words to the girl made his way into the house to see the Frenchman.

"Well, what d'you want now?" snarled the bearded giant, glaring. "Aw, don't let's quarrel over a girl," pleaded Sanchi with a grin. "Kinda forgot myself for a while. Sorry, old man." "Black" John laughed triumphantly. He secretly thought the other was afraid of him, afraid that perhaps he would kill the man who assisted the girl. He grinned and sank in a chair, clapping his hands for an attendant. "Stay out of my affairs, Sanchi," he rumbled. "Have a drink now and forget it." And the two men drank, while Sanchi sympathised with the Frenchman as he recounted the tale of the obstinate girl refusing to stay with him. And the newly arrived schooner captain, who had always been scrupulously chivalrous to women, agreed on the right of a man to beat up a woman who in any way displeased him. And so peace was made.

But later, when he got away, Sanchi sought out the girl and rubbed ointment in her hurts and told her to stay in the palm groves, where he would bring her food and water and later build her a shelter. The girl was resentful of his attentions at first. White men so seldom did anything for a native unless there was a motive. But as time passed and Sanchi said no word, the girl's confidence in him grew, and she came to look on him as a friend and to trust him with all the sincerity she was capable of.

TWO weeks after Sanchi's reception into the stronghold of the pirate of Heaven Island, the *Nauru* beat up to the anchorage and came to. Without waiting to see her gear stowed or for the shore launch to come off for him, Captain Rene Declare came ashore in haste by way of the whaleboat. "Black" John was on the sand to meet him, Sanchi by his side. The Frenchman was both pleased and puzzled. He had not expected his ship back so soon. She must have had an exceptionally fine voyage with good winds and favorable. But it was no tale of wonderful sailing days that Rene Declare brought.

He stepped from the whaleboat on to the white sand, took a few paces toward his employer and the small group surrounding him, and then stopped. He twisted his fierce little black moustaches rapidly, his dark eyes running over the men before him, until they rested at last on Sanchi, who knew a sudden sinking sensation.

"Ha!" The little French captain put worlds of meaning into the exclamation. He stepped toward Sanchi and bowed a little, his hand on his heart. He looked ridiculously fat and greasy to command such a fine craft as the *Nauru*. "Ha! So, traitor, you are here," Sanchi expelled his breath in one harsh gasp. He sensed something had gone wrong with the plans. Captain Rene Declare turned to the puzzled "Black" John with a dramatic flourish. "That, man," he pointed to Sanchi, and his voice rose with each word, "is a spy! There is a plot afoot to destroy us all, destroy us all. I, Rene Declare, say that this is so. The shooting of that man in Samoa was but a trick. You have heard?" "Black" John nodded even as he turned his savage gaze on Sanchi and loosened his revolver in his pouch. The rest of the white men gathered closer.

"Ha! Then this shooting was a trick. It was plotted that this man might come here as one of us... I heard from a native who heard Orville and this man, and the man who was shot, talking together on the schooner, *Lizzie R.*, laying in harbor. It is so! Destroy him, before he carries out his plans to destroy us... It is known in Samoa that there are plans planned to kill us all. Orville's yacht has disappeared, and half of the captains on the Island trade have disappeared!" Rene Declare ended with almost a scream and then stopped short for want of breath. With a bound "Black" John was at Sanchi's side and had gripped him by the shoulder, thrusting the muzzle of an automatic in his side.

"Is this true?" he said harshly, and there came a frightened muttering from the surrounding men. Sanchi shrugged indifferently. "Seems you take a lot for granted. Do you think I should tell a man I was going to shoot him? Do you think I should take the trouble to come here if I was in no danger? I think the captain is slightly affected by the heat, what?"

"Black" John slowly dropped his gun hand and looked searchingly from one man to the other. If there was the slightest chance of Rene Declare's story proving true, Sanchi would have to be destroyed. But on the other hand Sanchi was a valuable man to have around. "Black" John rather liked him. He was so cold and iron-nerved, just the man for the Frenchman's assistant. It was a matter for thought.

"IF YOU are a spy you'll die quickly," the Frenchman said grimly, "and if you're not then you can smash in the captain's face... Simons, you take him to your place and watch him. Better tie him up." The Austrian who shared a hut with Sanchi stepped forward and jammed his gun into the suspected man's neck. He never had liked Sanchi and he was only too glad of a chance to work out some spite on him. "March!" he growled, and followed by one or two of the other men the prisoner and jailer moved up the beach. "Black" John turned brusquely toward his own house and motioned to Rene Declare to follow. With him the captain brought a frightened kanaka, the same who had heard the conversation on the poop deck of the *Lizzie R.* There was small doubt of Sanchi getting clear. But because of his desire to keep Sanchi with him if possible, to make use of him as an able second in command, "Black" John would be very fair. He would question and ponder and probe until he arrived at the truth. And Sanchi himself knew what that would be, and mean. In spite of all efforts at secrecy it was apparent that something of the meeting of the captains had leaked out. Perhaps some man had talked a bit when in liquor, perhaps some official of the Administration had ventured a guess in public as to what was about to take place. At all events, it was evident that many rumors had served to arouse Captain Declare's suspicions and that the unfortunate circumstance of the kanaka overhearing Orville, Hyde, and Sanchi talking together on the poop of the *Lizzie R.* had given the captain very good grounds to base his suspicions on. He was vitally interested in the whole affair, for he stood or fell with "Black" John.

FOR two days Sanchi had lain bound and helpless in the hut of Simons the Austrian. He had been tortured by the biting insects, by the terrific heat of the indoors, and by the many kicks and blows bestowed by his jailer. Thrice had he been smartly hurried before "Black" John, questioned and questioned. There was no doubt now in the Frenchman's mind but what Captain Declare had found out was true. But the only man on Heaven Island who knew of the plans laid for the extermination of the gang of wreckers and pirates, was Sanchi. And it was only in the hope of sometime forcing from him the full story of what the plans were, and thus enabling them to be checked, that "Black" John allowed his captive to live at all.

The last interview, on the afternoon of the second day, had been the longest. Captain Declare, Simons, "Black" John and Sanchi alone had been present. Never was any criminal put through a stiffer "third degree." For three hours, without cessation, each man took it in turn to



pummel and question the bound captive. But Sanchi had preserved his silence. He only declared that the rumors must be ill founded. He declared that he had shot Hyde in a fit of passion, and denied any plot afoot to exterminate "Black" John. Sanchi tried everything he knew to restore the Frenchman's confidence, but the evidence was too strong, and a fear that had lurked for years, hidden and ignored, in the escaped convict's breast, gnawed at him and filled him with restless anxiety. Attempts had been made before to oust him, but his agents had always had word of them and he had been able to block them before they matured. He had even been warned before when the British cruiser had paid him a visit. But this half-confirmed, half-denied knowledge he had of some move in progress had him baffled and puzzled. What was it? Was Sanchi just to find clues of missing ships and men? Was there another cruiser coming? Was a raid to be made on him? Were all the captains of the Pacific, as Captain Declare insisted, banding together to wipe him out privately? Was Sanchi the sole active mover in the plot or was he but the vanguard, a promise of what was to come? "Black" John neither ate nor slept while he pondered the questions. But he drank hugely and grew more haggard with every passing hour. Were he driven from Heaven Island there was no place he could go to. Had the plot been rumored to be anything else but what Captain Declare said it was, a direct private war, "Black" John would have laughed and shot Sanchi and thought no more about it. The Law he could afford to ignore. He never left evidence of any crime for any nation to seize on. Then he remembered that the mate of the schooner, *The Ghost*, had escaped, fatally wounded it was believed, it was true, but what if he had not died? What if his testimony had been given to someone in authority and accepted as final proof? Even so, the Frenchman knew he could not be extradited. It was the idea of a private war that worried him. His enemies could bring an army against him. And so, in his terrible anxiety, grasping at an opportunity to satisfy himself as to what moves were being made, he allowed Sanchi to live, for dead he would not be able to tell what he knew.

AT THE close of the last interview, Sanchi, a battered hulk, the other three men exhausted, "Black" John had lost patience.

"Till nightfall to think it over, Sanchi," he had snarled wearily. "If you don't talk then I'll let the kan-kas try their bush ways on you. Hot wood splinters, cracked joints. Savve? Think it over carefully." And Sanchi had managed a grin and a "Beastly crude, what?" before Simons took him away to the hut again.

Aching in every limb, his head whirling and singing dizzily, Bruce Sanchi breathed heavily as he gazed up at the dim-lit roof and considered his position. It was more desperate than it had ever been before. Not even the Russians had had him in such an awkward corner. And not twenty miles away the *Tiger* lay waiting the signal, the signal he would never give. Of course, his death would not save "Black" John. Nothing could save the Frenchman now that Orville had personally undertaken to wipe him out. But that was of small comfort to a man who is yet rather young, has much of his life to live, and has a reputation as a clever and able adventurer to keep up.

Simons went out to his supper with the fall of dusk, after making sure his captive was secure. All the white men ate on the verandah of the Frenchman's house, and there was an extra large crowd, as well as a noisy one. The two white mates and the supercargo from the *Nauru* were present, besides "Black" John, Captain Rene Declare, and twelve other white men. Soft-footed, white-clothed kanakas waited on them, serving endless drinks in long, thin glasses. Heaven Island had every material need for such men as "Black" John had gathered to him.

Later, girls danced and sang and played weird native instruments, and then, as usual, the respectfully started supper developed into an orgy. In a few hours, when the moon came up over the lagoon perhaps, the prisoners would be remembered again and the promised torture would commence. But in the meantime there was pleasure, women, wine, and song, and because of his gnawing anxiety

the Frenchman flung himself into the revelries with more zest than usual.

BRUCE SANCHI did not hear a thing, nor did he see her until she knelt beside him. Her coming was something of a shock, for he had forgotten her. Then he thanked God, not as an expletive, but earnestly, as he had not done in years. He smelt the flowers in her hair as she bent over him, the soft touch of her fingers as they stroked his bruised shoulders and face, and then untied the ropes that bound him.

"I wondered why you did not come. I grew hungry for food and for sight of you. So I walked about the plantations and I heard that you were crushed by the anger of the Dark One. And so I came," said Kasiva simply, her big eyes glowing softly in the panting hot gloom of the hut. Sanchi remembered the day he had lifted this girl from the feet of "Black" John and thereby braved his anger, and he knew he was being repaid.

It was a long time before he could sit up and gently massage his long-bound arms. He had not thought such exquisite agony could possibly result from being tied up for two days. And he had to hasten. At any moment Simons might come staggering drunkenly toward the hut for something or the other. Sanchi sat up on the low frame bed, covered with native mats, on which he had been flung, and felt the floor with his feet. Assisted by Kasiva he lifted himself upright, stood for a moment leaning on the smooth young shoulder of the girl, and then tottered wearily toward the open door, through which the verandah of the stone house, lit by many hurricane lamps, was visible in the near distance across the pounded compound-like stretch of ground between "Black" John's quarters and the rest of the village.

Sanchi could see the Frenchman moodily drinking at one end of a great table, and the rest of the white men lining the sides and drinking too. Some were laughing, some singing, one or two joking with women or watching the girls dance.

THE hut lay in the dimness of the starlight and could not be seen from the verandah. Once outside Sanchi recovered himself somewhat and allowed the cool night wind to fan his fevered forehead and soothingly ripple over his bruised flesh. He had not much time and he had to hurry. Still leaning on the girl he tottered across the compound and making a wide detour, hugging close to the inside of the high stockade, arrived at last behind the house of "Black" John, the opposite side to the broad verandah.

Dimly to be seen was the long, low storehouse where most of the gear and tools necessary for the plantations were kept. Sanchi had had a key to the sliding doors when he had been in the Frenchman's favor, and it had not been taken from his pocket, though Simons had removed most everything else. He unlocked the doors and followed by the unquestioning girl went inside the dark shed.

He emerged some five minutes later carrying two large, square, and apparently heavy cans, one in each hand. The girl followed him similarly loaded and the two of them moved off toward the inside of the stockade again. With what seemed unnecessary care to the bewildered Kasiva, who thought her white man was mad anyway, Sanchi removed the metal stopper from the cans and sprinkled the colorless contents over the stockade for a distance of perhaps forty feet. The wood was dry and would burn well. And the gas had been originally intended for the use of the Frenchman's launch. One can remaining, Sanchi sprinkled those huts on the windward side of the village and then discarding the useless receptacles he made off toward Simons' hut with the intention of getting a box of matches and also the automatic pistol and belt that had belonged to him and was now hanging from a nail in the lintel of the door. He swore dully to himself for not having remembered to bring both articles when leaving the place.

He reached the hut in safety, the girl by his side, and groped about for the matches. He found them after a while and slipped them inside his ragged shirt. The automatic was easier to find and he strapped the belt round his waist with a feeling of renewed strength. The cold touch of the butt was comforting. His head was not swimming quite so much



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now and he felt ready for what lay before him.

"Exit 'Black' John," he grinned feebly to himself in the darkness. "Bally awful job, this. Lord, I could stand a stiff Scotch-and-soda now." Then aloud to the girl. "Keep to me, Kasiva. There will be fire and much shooting and you must not get hurt." The girl grunted to show she understood and slipped outside the doorway. There was a thud as she collided with someone, a scuffle, a snarl, and then a bitter drunken oath.

"What you doing here?" Sanchi recognized the voice. It was Simons. Quietly the former captive stepped outside the hut and brought his pistol butt smartly across the temple of the dim figure viciously shaking the whimpering Kasiva. Simon dropped without a groan and Sanchi rolled him out of the way with his foot. Then catching the girl by the wrist, he led her away.

WALLACE HAWKE pointed quietly away to starboard and without a word stepped to the telegraph. He rang for full speed. "Hard a port!" he said to the helmsman, who happened to be the owner of a ship twice as big as the *Tiger*.

"Hard a port, sir," repeated the man, and the helm swung around until the yacht's head pointed dead on the dull crimson glare that flickered and died on the very edge of the sea.

Then Wallace Hawke strode to the bridge wing where Orville was peering through the night glasses. The little millionaire turned round and snorted as the captain approached. "Better call all hands to get armed. There'll be something doing before dawn. I expected Bruce to get to work sooner than this. That man's too damned fond of playing with fire. Get burnt one day!"

The captain's whistle cut short Orville's grumbling, and one by one the captains who manned the yacht came on the bridge to arm themselves and talk in low voices one with the other on the war they were about to commence.

The *Tiger's* powerful engines literally ate up the sea distance to the beach from whence glowed the crimson light of something burning. The water was calm, as it usually was in those latitudes, and the tide with the yacht in her race landward. As she came closer inshore the glare increased revealing itself at last as a great fire against which the palms and breadfruit trees lining the beach were silhouetted in clear-cut black. The light beat back the glittering stars and paled the silver of the just rising moon. A fierce crackling of wilting wood came to the ears of the listening and watching captains as the *Tiger* dropped anchor right alongside the almost deserted *Nauru*. From the rail of the yacht a party of men led by Captain Sam Boggs, his steward's duties forgotten for the moment, leapt aboard the big full-rigger and proceeded to destroy her, flinging the few Kanakas who were aboard into the sea to swim ashore as best they could.

Two powerful launches, they had been hanging in side davits, came down to the water with a run, and into them piled the captains with set faces and tightened lips. Orville stood in the stern sheets of the first as she shot toward the shore. He waved a Winchester repeater in his right hand and glared behind at the other launch. "Remember, without trace!" he shouted harshly. "Every man, whether he fights or not!" A dull murmur of approval came from the launches.

A minute later and both craft grounded on the sand, and the splutter of their engines died away unheard in the dull roar of the flames behind the palms. The beach was dyed red and brilliantly lit, the flames leaping so high that the palm shadows were short and hard and right alongside the trees themselves.

Orville looked at the knot of men who had landed with him, and nodded his head. For the first time during the whole proceedings, he smiled, a grim little smile. He waved to Wallace Hawke who stood moodily twisting his bristling white moustache and leaning on the muzzle of his rifle. "You lead way to the right, Hawke."

The captain nodded and moved away immediately down the beach and up toward the fire. He was followed by five men. Orville set straight up the beach

for the palm-belt, lined so nakedly black against the glare.

IN THE dense groves on the landward side of the stockade, Bruce Sanchi and his little charge, Kasiva, watched the gasoline catch and lick in flame about the high-pointed-stakes and the beehive-like huts. In less than five minutes the stockade was a raging inferno, and with startled shouts the diners from the verandah of "Black" John's house were running across the compound toward the fire.

"Black" John himself led them, his dark eyes blazing with fury and his beard blowing back over his shoulders. He could smell the gasoline and to his brain, tortured with the anxiety of the past few days, came the thought, "This is a part of the plot." He made straight for the hut of Simons, stopped short as he stumbled over the Austrian's prostrate body, and dropped to his knees with a curse. He dragged the figure into the glare of the flames and shook it savagely. The Austrian sat up and gurgled and then drew his ruffled wits together. "The girl, Kasiva," he croaked after a while. "She must have let Sanchi go. Some one knocked me cold and..." But the Frenchman had let him fall to the ground again and had dashed off towards his men, running frantically about on the very edge of the devouring flames, one or two vainly throwing handfuls of hastily snatched up sand.

"Fools!" The Frenchman's anger was terrible to behold. He towered bareheaded above his satellites, his teeth gritting and gleaming between the black hair of his face, his mighty hands opening and closing his jet black eyes alight with the flames and his own rage. "Fools! The fire cannot be checked. Smell the oil burning? Scatter and search for that—Sanchi and the—girl! Search, I tell you!" With frightened glances toward their chief the white men surged irresolutely toward the stockade gate and passed beyond into the dancing hard shadows among the palms. There they met the mob of native laborers and women who had come up from their own village some quarter of a mile down the beach to see what the fire was. Confusion ensued for some time.

LEFT to himself the Frenchman glared savagely at the devouring flames, cursed as he realised his stockade, or a great portion of it, was doomed, and then walked moodily back to the house, where he procured an extra belt of cartridges for his pistol and also his favorite rifle. Then he went toward the stockade gate, and ignoring the glances of the watching natives passed into the palms and commenced to completely encircle the stockade from the outside.

After seeing that the fire had taken good hold and was not to be checked, and after hearing "Black" John give his orders to search, Sanchi led the way to the beach followed by the girl, stopping in cover now and then to let an excitedly chattering group of natives hurry by toward the white men's village.

Among the last few palms, those immediately on the edge of the sand, Sanchi sat down and waited. He saw the *Tiger* appear like a white ghost ship out of the starlight to seaward, saw her reflect from her slim sides the glare of the flames, saw the party board the *Nauru* and then the two launches put off for the beach. He rose to meet his old comrades and smiled with satisfaction that he had carried out his share of the plans to the letter. The stockade would soon be destroyed, useless as a means of defense, and "Black" John would have no place in which to retreat and defy his destroyers. Sanchi was about to step out of the palm shadow when the crunch of shoes caught his ear. He turned swiftly to catch sight of a white drill suit through the gloom.

"So, Rene Declare was right, eh?" snarled the Frenchman, as he stepped forward and raised his rifle. "You—you won't live to see the day..." Sanchi's hand snapped down to his automatic, but Kasiva was even quicker. She flung herself between the rifle muzzle and the man who had treated her kindly, the kindest of any man she had ever known. The soft-nosed shot entered her softer breast and drew the life from her in its passage. Sanchi fired almost simultaneously and missed. He felt the girl go limp in his arms and knew instinctively she had given her life for his. He let her fall



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as another shot whined viciously past his throat. He snapped again at the Frenchman and saw him reel slightly, but not fall. "Black" John was sheltering now behind a palm trunk, while Sanchi stood only in the shadow, the open beach behind him. He turned suddenly and commenced to run toward Orville's party, coming directly towards him, attracted by the shots. He zig-zagged as much as possible to destroy the Frenchman's aim.

The captains commenced to run. They only heard one rifle shooting and the hot blood of excitement was beginning to grip them. Scarce ten yards from the palm shadow a slight, gaunt figure in torn shirt and grimy white pants, bare-footed and disheveled of hair burst upon them. The figure waved an automatic and was shouting something. So disfigured with bruises and weals was the face, that for a moment none of the captains recognized it. Then came the words very clearly, though breathlessly. "Just in time, what?"

"SANCHI!" yelled Orville, running forward and firing at the same time into the shadow from whence came a dull tongue of flame and the report of a rifle. Sanchi just had time to grin in the face of the little millionaire when "Black" John's last shot took him in the shoulder and knocked him off his feet. Orville stopped. "Go on," he screamed to his followers, and they poured past him, while he dropped to his knees beside the wounded man.

"Black" John held his ground until the captains were within six feet of him. Two he wounded. Had he been clear-headed and steady-nerved he would have killed several, for he was an excellent marksman. But he was wounded himself from Sanchi's last shot, and his hand was shaking with the fear that clutched him and tore madly at his brain. He turned and fled through the palms at the last, away from the captains who ran gropingly through the shadows on unfamiliar ground. "Black" John sobbed deep in his throat. The dawn found him master and king in his own land, with several hundred men, brown and white, who awaited on his orders; with wealth beyond the dreams of average men. The night saw him wounded and broken, his boasted stockade fort in ashes, his followers scattered over the island unaware as yet that they were attacked. The plan of a private war, as Rene Declare had insisted, was right. "Black" John had recognized several of the faces of the captains. He knew Orville, he knew "Long" Charley. It was true. The captains of all the Pacific had risen at last to wipe him from the memory of the Islands. For seven long years he had preyed on the little helpless shipping, a schooner here, a lugger there, once or twice bigger ships, barques or brigantines. He had taken his toll of the white women and the brown. And this was the end. The Law had been, even at the last, unable to touch him. But there were things greater than the Law. Here was a combination greater. The Captains of the Pacific were a Law to themselves, and it was the end of the Heaven Island days, of "Black" John, and of the long career of piracy and rapine. Another age of Pacific history was written.

THROUGH the starlight and the shadow the Frenchman ran. He heard the firing behind him growing. He guessed that his followers must be facing the surprise of attack now. What was that to him? He knew that he was facing more than attack. He was facing death. It was only too evident that the captains would never let a man escape to carry the news of the massacre. And of all men it was certain "Black" John would not escape. He had wild thoughts of heading back for his launch and making for the open sea, but rejected the idea as soon as he thought it over. The powerful steam yacht he had caught a glimpse of off-shore could run even his launch down. He was trapped. He must fight it out. He bared his teeth and turned in the dark as a horde of brown men swept through the trees towards him. He shouted, but they took no heed. Fear swept him. His own native laborers! He remembered wildly the times he had had them flogged, their women he had maltreated. Hysterically he screamed and swung his rifle by the barrel, his mighty strength shattering skulls with the swinging butt. But they were too many for him. With eager yelps they closed. He broke clear by virtue of his

great muscles and the dead that clogged the way to him. One idea was his now. He must square the accounts with Sanchi, the man who had destroyed the stockade and thus "Black" John. Still sobbing deep in his throat, the Frenchman crashed through the brush toward the beach again and toward the grim-lipped captains.

FOR nearly an hour the intermittent sound of firing was heard. Once or twice white-clothed figures burst on to the beach, to double back as Orville took a snap at them. Three times bodies of native laborers, the fierce cannibals from the island to the east, swept along the sand, hunting the men who had oppressed them and whipped them for so long. The cannibals had gleefully seized the chance of the man-hunt. Some new white men had come from the sea to fight their white men. They would help the new white men. It was a night to be remembered, a night of desperate fights, of crashing through obstinate brush, of men dying with curses on their lips, under the bullets of the captains or beneath the strangling thumbs of the glistening-eyed natives. And as each white man was destroyed the captains had him brought, (they had to fight the cannibals in some cases) to the beach where he was laid alongside other still figures. Sanchi had given the number of white men with "Black" John and there must be no chance of one being overlooked.

The sound of firing had died away for some minutes, and a sort of tense silence had descended over the island. The fire of the stockade had died down until only a dull glow came from the white-hot ash, and was nearly dimmed by the bright moon that flooded the beach and the palm tops with light. "Black" John came hurriedly, intent on only one purpose, to destroy the man who had destroyed him.

He was limping on one crimson-stained leg, and his erstwhile immaculate whites were torn and bloody all over. His beard was singed and powder-stained, and he shook like a man with the ague as he stepped into view, not twenty yards from Orville and Sanchi, and ran forward firing wildly with his pistol, having lost his rifle during the wild ten minutes with some of his native laborers.

A couple of shots nicked Orville's arm before the millionaire was aware what was happening. Sanchi strove to raise himself up and fire with his automatic, but Orville was before him, firing swiftly at the onrushing man. The Frenchman halted, swayed for a moment, tried to fire at his foes again, and then crumpled slowly from the knees to the sand. Even as he lay there, Orville shot him through the head again.

"That's for my niece," he whispered dryly, and then dropping back beside the wounded Sanchi, he laughed for a long time. He fished a pocket flask out when his laughing was over and giving Sanchi a drink took a long drink himself. It steadied him, and putting a whistle to his lips he blew upon it shrilly three times. The captains came straggling to his side, by two and threes, more rarely alone.

WHEN they had all gathered, a silent group, most of them lightly wounded, all of them sweating and sick with the work they had accomplished, Orville stood up and carefully counted the bodies laid out on the beach nearby. All were there now, two white mates and the supercargo from the *Nauru*, Captain Rene Declare, and twelve other white men, and lastly "Black" John himself. There was not a living white man of all the Frenchman's gang to tell of the end that had befallen them. The stockade was a thing of the past, the stone house gutted and fire-blackened, the rest of the huts in ashes. Remained only the natives. The extermination had been complete and carried out with the minimum of risk.

The man-hunt at an end, the curious natives were gathering in great crowds about the silent throng, ready at the slightest chance to fall on them as they had fallen on the other white men. The sight of the efficient rifles and the determined bearing of the group had a restraining effect however. These were not white men being hunted by their own kind, fleeing in the darkness practically unarmed and without courage.

Orville stepped toward the natives and spoke to them in their own dialect. "It is the Law that every man shall be off this island before dawn. You have come

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from the island that lies toward the rising sun, and to that island you shall return. Any man who stays here after the sun rises shall die. And this is the Law."

There was at first silence, and then much excited chattering, later calls to friends and relatives to hurry down to the beach and fulfill the white man's law. Orville turned away to give orders.

The *Nauru* was afloat. She was being saved for a purpose. Her papers had been destroyed by the boarding party, and every piece of woodwork where her name occurred had been hacked and slashed beyond recognition. Aboard her, launch-load by launch-load, the natives were taken and piled into the spacious half-empty holds.

The *Tiger* put a line aboard and towed the *Nauru's* head round to seaward while this was being accomplished, and when every last native was aboard the sailing vessel, and the dead bodies of the white men were safe aboard the yacht, the two vessels started in the direction of the rising sun.

EXCEPT for wondering seabirds that swept above the lagoon surface, and the croaking parrots that swept through the palm groves, Heaven Island lay astern uninhabited and safe for the mariner to water at once more. In a few months the jungle would be where the stockade had been, the young palms growing through the very walls of the stone house of "Black" John. The war was over.

The *Nauru* was towed to the large island to the east, and there beached. The natives swarmed over the sides to the sand of their native shore and with many cries disappeared into the sullen walls of the jungle, back to their villages and families to tell of the wondrous things

they had seen and the wonderful way they had been delivered from bondage.

The *Nauru* burned well, and the *Tiger* stood by until the last timber of the old full-rigger was white ash that sizzled in the water of the shallows. The captains lined the yacht's rail and watched grimly, with that satisfying feeling of work well done and of a benefit rendered to the world.

As mysteriously as she had disappeared the *Tiger* appeared once more among the shipping of the Islands, and many ships that had been making voyages under the temporary command of mates appeared in charge of their rightful owners and masters again. Bruce Sanchi was smuggled ashore in Apia and went to keep young Hyde company in Orville's own house and to explain to him, under oath of secrecy, all that had happened. Orville himself went about cheerfully with a narrow band of crepe on his left arm, though whether as a sort of secret irony for "Black" John, or whether as a sign of mourning for his niece, no one ever knew.

Apia had another terrific shock some time later, a shock that was never satisfactorily explained even in the most knowing and exclusive circles. Orville, young Hyde, and Bruce Sanchi, appeared one night in Roberts' saloon arm-in-arm and apparently on the best of terms, while the authorities seemed to have completely forgotten that Sanchi was ever a hunted and a wanted man. One other thing took place which no one would have thought of connecting with Orville and the two young men with him. The insurance rates for ships making a run to Yokohama dropped very satisfactorily to a reasonable figure. Perhaps "Black" John and his satellites, floating somewhere about a hundred fathoms down, could have guessed why.

## The Fit-Up

Continued from page 19

thousand had been promised, definitely promised. In writing? Well, no—not exactly in writing. But still, he—Leesthorpe—had never imagined—Who could have imagined?

"That's all very well," interrupted the dramatist, grimly, "but what about my play? You've contracted with me to produce it."

"We've done our best," Leesthorpe's eyes grew sullen. "You've got no claim against us. So long as the curtain goes up on the first night—"

Hapgood lost his temper. "You might have thought of that—before you bought the play."

"My dear chap, you don't suggest we did it on purpose?"

"Don't 'dear chap' me, Leesthorpe." All the dramatist's suppressed dislike of the man rose to the surface. "You and your wife are in a hole. A deuce of a hole. You think you can bring pressure on me to help you out of it."

"Pressure!" Leesthorpe, jaw twitching, forced a smile. "Pressure! My dear fellow!" Then, wheedling: "Of course I understand your being vexed. But the play's a winner. You've always thought that. And with Helene's public! Besides, to a rich man, to a successful playwright like yourself, what's two thousand pounds?"

HAPGOOD kept silence, many ideas passing through his mind. The position was certainly unique, dramatic; the play, properly acted, as near a certain winner as anything can be certain in theatreland. If it "went over," his two thousand might become four, six, eight. But could he find two thousand? At once! The bank would lend it, of course. But that meant pawning securities, investments. And investments were falling. Supposing the play failed! Besides, he had promised Mrs. John—

"You will think it over, won't you?" Leesthorpe was still talking. "Remember, Helene's never been in a failure yet."

And at that, abruptly, Hapgood's mental eye saw two visions—a London theatre and a provincial "fit-up"; Marian Delorme as played by Helene Dalby and Marian Delorme as played by Moira Mitchell.

"Leesthorpe," he began, "let's put our cards on the table. It isn't a dramatist's business to finance his own plays. But if

he does, he's entitled to speak his mind. Now, I'm going to speak mine. To begin with, I don't think 'The Young Lady in Mauve' suits your wife's style of acting."

Hugh Leesthorpe leaned forward from his chair as though the other had struck him in the stomach. "You don't think—" he stammered.

Calmly, John Hapgood repeated his statement; calmly, he went on to state his terms. Stating them, a new sensation came to him—the sensation of power. Always, heretofore, he had needed to go tactfully through that dark jungle which is theatreland. Now, for the first time, he allowed himself the luxury of truth-telling.

"I'm not blaming you, Leesthorpe," he said. "A man naturally overrates his wife's abilities. Your confidence in her is all to your credit. But—take it from me—the part's beyond her. If I'm to put up this money, she'll have to throw it up."

And to that last issue Hapgood stuck. Vainly the other raved, protested, showed his teeth; vainly—for three long days—he wrote, telegraphed, argued in person and over the telephone; vainly he threatened to "put the curtain up for a week and risk it."

"You can't do that," said Hapgood, blandly; "you haven't got enough cash for the preliminary advertising."

Finally, in despair, Leesthorpe went to Saxby. "Hapgood's mad," said Leesthorpe. "Quite mad. If once the public knows that my wife's thrown up the part, it's good-bye to 'The Young Lady in Mauve'."

"Old boy," said Saxby, trying, agent-like, to sit on both sides of the fence, "you're absolutely right. Let me settle this. I'm sure I can bring him to reason."

But Saxby, calling in person at Hapgood's hotel, was met with a quiet, "Please don't interfere. I'm handling this deal on my own."

AFTER her two-minute interview with Leesthorpe—an interview during which the star's husband had seemed even to her unimagining eyes, like a man distraught—Moira Mitchell walked home to the suburban room she occupied when "resting." Leesthorpe had promised to "let her know if he could give her anything."

For a day, the vague promise buoyed